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Factors Associated with the School-to-Work Transition Success of Learners with Special Educational Needs towards a Framework for Successful Transition

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the factors associated with the school-to-work transition success of learners with special educational needs (LSEs) and proposed a framework for successful transition. A descriptive-correlational research design was utilized involving 50 LSEs enrolled in a special education program. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made questionnaire assessing functional life skills, communication skills, vocational skills, self-determination, social skills, family support, and transition services. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and regression analysis were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that most learners demonstrated moderate to high levels of transition performance. Correlation analysis showed that all examined factors were significantly associated with school-to-work transition success. Regression analysis further identified vocational skills, self-determination, family support, and transition services as significant predictors, with vocational skills emerging as the strongest predictor. The findings suggest that successful transition outcomes among LSEs require a holistic approach integrating employability preparation, learner autonomy, family involvement, and structured transition support services. The study highlights the importance of strengthening vocational training, individualized transition planning, family-school collaboration, and work-based learning opportunities to improve employment readiness and independent living outcomes among learners with special educational needs.

INTRODUCTION

Learners with special educational needs continue to encounter substantial challenges in securing and maintaining meaningful employment. Despite global efforts to promote inclusive education and equal opportunities, individuals with disabilities often experience lower employment rates, limited wages and career advancement opportunities, workplace discrimination, and inadequate access to accommodations and support services (Frentzel *et al.*, 2021; Guarine, 2023; Williams & Lowe, 2025). These persistent barriers highlight the importance of preparing learners with special educational needs for successful transition from school to employment and independent adult life.

School-to-work transition is a critical developmental stage that involves preparing learners to move from the educational setting into employment, vocational training, community participation, and independent living. Transition readiness encompasses the development of essential knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary for successful employment and adult functioning (Mastam & Zaharudin, 2024). For learners with special educational needs, readiness for work extends beyond academic achievement and includes functional life skills, communication competence, vocational abilities, self-determination, social adjustment, and adaptive behaviors. Effective transition programs are therefore essential in equipping learners with the necessary competencies to participate meaningfully in the workforce and society

(King *et al.*, 2006; Pestano, 2026).

Globally, educational systems and policy frameworks have increasingly emphasized transition services and career preparation for learners with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act emphasized the importance of transition planning to support learners in moving from school to post-school activities, including employment, vocational education, and independent living (IDEA, 2004). Similarly, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization highlighted that inclusive education should prepare learners with disabilities for active participation in society and the labor force (UNESCO, 2020). These international initiatives recognize employment as a vital indicator of independence, quality of life, and social inclusion among individuals with disabilities. However, despite these policy advancements and continuing global efforts, many learners with special educational needs still experience difficulties in transitioning successfully from school to employment (Abed, Abed, & Shackelford, 2024; Peterson, 2026; Stamp *et al.*, 2026). Consequently, many graduates remain unemployed, dependent on family support, or inadequately prepared to adapt to workplace expectations and environments.

In response to these challenges, functional and evidence-based transition frameworks have become increasingly important in guiding schools, educators, families, and stakeholders in supporting learners with special educational needs toward successful employment

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outcomes (Li *et al.*, 2025; Mokhtar, Zaharudin, & Yusof Azuddin, 2024). These frameworks provide structured interventions, coordinated support systems, and transition services that focus on employability skills, independent living competencies, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy (Liao, 2024; Migliore *et al.*, 2025). Developing a contextualized school-to-work transition framework may help strengthen existing transition programs and ensure that services are responsive to the diverse needs, abilities, and future aspirations of learners with special educational needs.

Hence, this study aims to examine the factors associated with the school-to-work transition success of learners with special educational needs. The findings of the study may serve as a basis for the development of a comprehensive school-to-work transition framework that can enhance transition programs, improve employability and independent living skills, and support successful transition to employment and adult life among learners with special educational needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School-to-work transition among learners with special educational needs (LSEs) has become an important concern in inclusive education due to the persistent barriers faced by individuals with disabilities in employment and independent living. Previous studies emphasized that successful transition outcomes depend on the development of vocational skills, functional life skills, communication skills, social competence, self-determination, family support, and effective transition services. Alwell and Cobb (2009) explained that functional life skills interventions significantly improve transition-related outcomes among youth with disabilities by strengthening independent living and workplace adaptability. Similarly, Poll *et al.* (2026) highlighted that communication skills and social communication adaptability are essential for successful participation in workplace and post-school environments.

Vocational preparation has also been identified as a critical factor influencing employment success among learners with disabilities. Ineland, Karhina, and Vikström (2021) emphasized that workplace-based training and vocational education improve employability competencies and transition readiness among students with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, self-determination was found to significantly predict successful postsecondary and employment outcomes. Chao, Chou, and Cheng (2019) revealed that learners with stronger self-determination skills are more likely to successfully transition into college or employment after graduation.

Family involvement and transition services were likewise recognized as important support mechanisms in transition success. Studies showed that emotional support, parental involvement, vocational counseling, work immersion, and collaborative transition planning positively contribute to employment preparation and independent living outcomes among learners with disabilities (Bakken, 2019;

Safari, 2025). Despite the growing body of literature, limited studies have examined the combined influence of vocational skills, functional life skills, communication skills, social skills, self-determination, family support, and transition services on the school-to-work transition performance of LSEs using a comprehensive framework. Thus, this study addresses these gaps by examining the factors associated with school-to-work transition success and proposing a contextualized framework for successful transition among LSEs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the factors associated with the school-to-work transition success of learners with special educational needs and to develop a proposed transition framework. The participants included 50 learners with special educational needs enrolled in a special education program. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made questionnaire assessing functional life skills, communication, vocational skills, self-determination, social skills, family support, and transition services. A purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the respondents. The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, and regression analysis to identify the significant factors related to successful school-to-work transition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study examined the school-to-work transition performance of learners with special educational needs and the factors associated with their successful transition to employment in order to provide empirical evidence that will serve as the basis for developing a contextualized and evidence-based transition framework for learners with special educational needs.

Table 1 presents the school-to-work transition performance of learners with special educational needs. Findings revealed that most respondents fall under the High (36%) and Moderate (28%) categories, indicating

Table 1: School-to-Work Transition Performance of Learners with Special Educational Needs

Transition Performance Level	F	%
Very High (Highly Successful Transition)	9	18.00
High (Successful Transition)	18	36.00
Moderate (Fair Transition Readiness)	14	28.00
Low (Limited Transition Success)	7	14.00
Very Low (Poor Transition Success)	2	4.00
Total	50	100

generally acceptable to strong levels of transition success. However, a smaller proportion were classified under Low (14%) and Very Low (4%) performance, suggesting that some learners continue to experience challenges in workplace readiness, adaptation, and sustained employment participation. Only 18% achieved a Very High level of transition success, reflecting strong readiness for employment and independent functioning. Overall, these results indicate generally positive outcomes, but also highlight the need to strengthen transition programs and provide targeted support for learners with lower performance levels. Consistent with these findings, Baker

et al. (2020) noted that learners with special educational needs often face challenges to employment, including limited work experience, weak transition planning, and inadequate support services. Similarly, Bialik and Mhiri (2022) emphasized that employment outcomes for learners with disabilities are further constrained by structural barriers and underscores that successful transition depends not only on individual readiness but also on supportive environments and policies. Table 2 illustrates both the level of factors associated with successful school-to-work transition and their relationship with transition performance among learners

Table 2: Descriptive and Correlation Results of the Factors Associated with LSEN’s Transition Performance

Factors	Mean	Verbal Description	p-value	Interpretation
Functional Life Skills	4.32	High	0.03	Significant
Communication Skills	4.18	High	0.04	Significant
Vocational Skills	3.89	Moderate	0.03	Significant
Self-Determination	4.10	High	0.02	Significant
Social Skills	4.25	High	0.03	Significant
Family Support	4.45	Very High	0.02	Significant
Transition Services	3.76	Moderate	0.03	Significant

Legend: 4.21–5.00 – Very High, 3.41–4.20 – High, 2.61–3.40 – Moderate, 1.81–2.60 – Low 1.00–1.80, – Very Low

with special educational needs. The findings show that all indicators were rated from moderate to very high, with family support obtaining the highest mean (4.45), indicating its strong influence in preparing learners for employment and independent living. Functional life skills, social skills, communication skills, and self-determination were also rated high, reflecting adequate personal and social competencies among the respondents. Meanwhile, vocational skills and transition services were rated moderate, suggesting the need for strengthening work-related training and structured transition programs.

Functional Life Skills and School-to-Work Transition Performance

Learners with special educational needs (LSENs) obtained a very high level of functional life skills based on the mean score of 4.32, described as Very High. This indicates that the learners possess strong competencies in practical daily living and independent functioning skills necessary for successful transition to employment and adult life. The results further revealed a significant relationship between functional life skills and transition performance, with a computed p-value of 0.03. This relationship suggests that functional life skills positively influence the school-to-work transition success of LSENs, particularly in adapting to workplace responsibilities and independent living demands. Alwell and Cobb (2009) argued that functional or life skills curricular interventions promote positive transition-related outcomes among youth with disabilities across different educational environments and

disability types.

The findings further imply that functional life skills serve as an essential foundation in preparing LSENs for employment and adult independence. Strengthening these competencies may improve learners’ confidence, adaptability, and productivity in real-world settings (Zats & Harrison, 2025). Conversely, inadequate functional life skills may hinder successful adjustment to workplace expectations and daily challenges. Hence, schools and transition programs should continuously reinforce life-skills training through experiential learning activities, community-based instruction, and workplace simulations to further enhance learners’ readiness for employment and independent adulthood (Jackson *et al.*, 2024).

Communication Skills and School-to-Work Transition Performance

The findings further showed that communication skills obtained a mean score of 4.18, described as High. This indicates that the respondents generally possess effective abilities in expressing themselves, understanding instructions, and interacting appropriately with other people in school and workplace settings. The p-value of 0.04 revealed a significant relationship between communication skills and school-to-work transition performance, suggesting that learners with stronger communication abilities are more likely to achieve successful transition outcomes.

The result implies that communication skills are essential in helping LSENs establish positive interpersonal

relationships and perform effectively in workplace environments. Poll *et al.* (2026) argued that effective social communication involves the ability to adapt communication according to different contexts, settings, and people, which is essential for successful participation in post-school and workplace environments. The significant relationship also highlights the need for schools and transition programs to strengthen oral communication, social interaction, and language development activities to further improve learners' employability and workplace adjustment (Migliore *et al.*, 2025).

Vocational Skills and School-to-Work Transition Performance

The data revealed that vocational skills obtained a mean score of 3.89, verbally described as High, with a p-value of 0.03 interpreted as significant. This indicates that learners with special educational needs (LSEs) demonstrate adequate work-related competencies and technical skills necessary for employment preparation. Furthermore, the significant p-value suggests a meaningful relationship between vocational skills and school-to-work transition performance, implying that learners with stronger vocational competencies are more likely to experience successful transition outcomes (Ineland, Karhina, & Vikström, 2021).

Based on the findings, it implies that vocational skills training is a critical component of transition programs for LSEs. Practical work experiences, technical training, and hands-on activities provide learners with opportunities to develop job-specific competencies and workplace readiness (Ogunleye & Okechukwu, 2025). The significant relationship further suggests the importance of strengthening vocational education, work immersion programs, and partnerships with industries to provide learners with meaningful employment preparation and career opportunities.

Self-Determination and School-to-Work Transition Performance

Based on the table it can be noticed that self-determination obtained a mean score of 4.10, described as High. This indicates that LSEs generally demonstrate the ability to make decisions, set goals, and advocate for themselves in different situations. The p-value of 0.02 indicated a significant relationship between self-determination and school-to-work transition performance, suggesting that learners with higher levels of self-determination tend to achieve better transition outcomes.

The results indicated that self-determination is an important factor in promoting independence and successful employment among LSEs. Learners who can make informed decisions, solve problems, and express their preferences are more capable of adapting to workplace expectations and adult responsibilities (Schwartz *et al.*, 2023). This finding highlights the importance of providing opportunities for learners to participate in decision-making activities, goal-setting exercises, and self-advocacy training within transition programs. According

to Chao, Chou and Cheng (2019), self-determination significantly predicts the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities, as stronger self-determination skills increase their likelihood of successfully entering college or the workforce after graduation.

Social Skills and School-to-Work Transition Performance

Social skills obtained a mean score of 4.25, which is verbally described as Very High. The computed p-value of 0.03 indicates a significant relationship between social skills and school-to-work transition performance. This suggests that learners with special educational needs (LSEs) possess strong interpersonal abilities and are generally capable of interacting appropriately with peers, teachers, and other individuals. Furthermore, the findings imply that learners who demonstrate better social skills are more likely to experience successful school-to-work transition outcomes (Alwell & Cobb, 2009).

Based on the result, social skills are essential for maintaining positive workplace relationships and adjusting to social expectations in employment settings. Skills such as cooperation, teamwork, respect, and conflict resolution contribute to effective workplace interaction and job retention (Wang, 2024). The significant relationship further suggests the importance of incorporating social skills training, collaborative activities, and peer interaction opportunities in transition programs to improve learners' employability and social adaptation (Angel, 2023; Saran *et al.* 2023).

Family Support and School-to-Work Transition Performance

The findings showed that family support obtained a mean score of 4.45, verbally described as Very High. This indicates that families provide strong emotional, social, and practical support to LSEs in preparing for employment and independent living. The p-value of 0.02 revealed a significant relationship between family support and school-to-work transition performance, suggesting that learners who receive stronger family support are more likely to achieve successful transition outcomes (Kumpiene, 2019).

Data suggests that family involvement plays a crucial role in the successful transition of LSEs from school to work. Families serve as primary sources of encouragement, motivation, guidance, and advocacy for learners as they prepare for adulthood and employment (Leif *et al.*, 2025; Safari, 2025). This finding highlights the need for schools and transition programs to strengthen family engagement initiatives, parent education programs, and collaborative planning activities to support learners' transition success.

Transition Services and School-to-Work Transition Performance

Transition services obtained a mean score of 3.76, verbally described as High, with a p-value of 0.03 interpreted as significant. This indicates that learners with special

educational needs (LSEs) generally receive adequate transition-related support and services that help prepare them for employment and adult life. Furthermore, the results show a significant relationship between transition services and school-to-work transition performance, suggesting that effective transition services contribute positively to successful transition outcomes among learners (Bakken, 2019).

The results imply that structured transition services play a vital role in equipping LSEs with the necessary support, guidance, and opportunities for successful employment

and independent living. Services such as career counseling, job coaching, work immersion, and vocational assessment help learners develop workplace competencies and career awareness. The significant relationship further emphasizes the need to strengthen school-based transition planning, inter-agency collaboration, and community partnerships to ensure comprehensive and responsive transition support for LSEs (Chhogyel & Tshering, 2023).

Table 3 presents the regression analysis on the predictors of school-to-work transition performance among learners with special educational needs. The findings revealed

Table 3: Regression Analysis on the Predictors of School-to-Work Transition Performance

Predictor Variables	Beta Coefficient	t-value	Sig.	Interpretation
Functional Life Skills	0.17	1.58	0.120	Not Significant
Communication Skills	0.13	1.31	0.195	Not Significant
Vocational Skills	0.39	3.74	0.03	Significant Predictor
Self-Determination	0.33	3.10	0.03	Significant Predictor
Social Skills	0.10	1.11	0.271	Not Significant
Family Support	0.30	2.85	0.04	Significant Predictor
Transition Services	0.28	2.67	0.010	Significant Predictor

that vocational skills, self-determination, family support, and transition services significantly predicted successful transition performance, with significance values less than 0.05. Among the predictors, vocational skills emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.39$), indicating that learners with stronger employability competencies and workplace readiness are more likely to experience successful transition outcomes (Ineland, Karhina, & Vikström, 2021). Self-determination ($\beta = 0.33$) and family support ($\beta = 0.30$) also significantly contributed to transition performance, emphasizing the importance of learner independence, confidence, and strong family involvement

(Chao, Chou, & Cheng, 2019; Safari, 2025).

Moreover, transition services ($\beta = 0.28$) significantly influenced school-to-work transition performance, highlighting the importance of structured transition programs, vocational training, work immersion, and collaborative school-community support in preparing learners for employment and independent living (Bakken, 2019; Chhogyel & Tshering, 2023). Meanwhile, functional life skills, communication skills, and social skills did not significantly predict transition performance when combined with the other variables in the regression model. Overall, the findings suggest that vocational preparation,

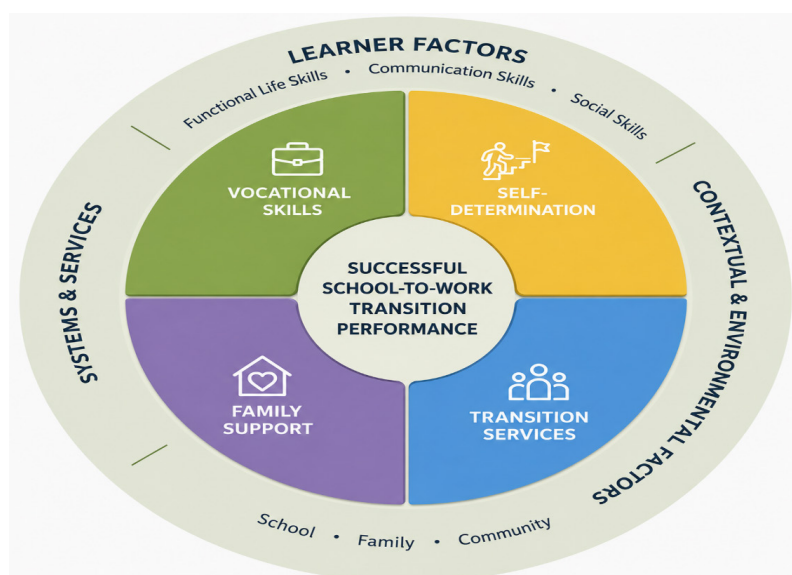


Figure 1: Model Framework for Successful School-to-Work Transition for LSEN's

learner self-determination, family engagement, and effective transition services are essential components of successful school-to-work transition among learners with special educational needs.

Model Framework for Successful School-to-Work Transition for LSEN's

The proposed framework for successful school-to-work transition of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) presents a holistic and collaborative model that emphasizes the significant factors influencing successful transition outcomes among learners. Anchored on the findings of the study, the framework identifies vocational skills, self-determination, family support, and transition services as the major predictors of successful school-to-work transition performance, with successful transition positioned at the center of the model as the ultimate goal. The framework highlights vocational skills as the strongest predictor, emphasizing the importance of employability competencies, technical abilities, work immersion, and practical training in preparing learners for employment and independent living. Self-determination is also emphasized as an essential learner factor that enables LSENs to make decisions, solve problems, advocate for themselves, and manage workplace responsibilities effectively. In addition, family support is recognized as a vital contextual factor that provides emotional encouragement, guidance, motivation, and advocacy, helping learners build confidence and readiness for adult life. Transition services further strengthen the framework by providing structured support mechanisms such as career counseling, vocational assessment, work immersion, job coaching, and collaborative school-community programs that facilitate successful employment outcomes. The framework also acknowledges the supportive role of functional life skills, communication skills, social skills, school support, family involvement, and community participation in enhancing learners' overall preparedness and adaptation to workplace environments. Overall, the proposed framework underscores that successful school-to-work transition among LSENs requires a comprehensive approach that integrates learner competencies, family engagement, and coordinated support systems to improve employability, independence, and quality of life among learners with special educational needs.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors associated with the school-to-work transition success of learners with special educational needs (LSENs) and developed a framework for a more effective and contextualized transition process. Findings revealed that LSENs generally demonstrate moderate to high levels of transition performance, indicating overall positive readiness for employment and independent living, although a notable proportion still experience challenges in workplace adaptation, preparedness, and sustained participation in work settings. The study further established that

functional life skills, communication skills, vocational skills, self-determination, social skills, family support, and transition services are all significantly related to school-to-work transition performance, underscoring that successful transition is shaped by the interaction of personal competencies, interpersonal abilities, family engagement, and institutional support systems. Among these factors, family support obtained the highest mean, highlighting its critical role in strengthening learners' motivation, confidence, and readiness for adult life. However, regression analysis identified vocational skills, self-determination, family support, and transition services as the significant predictors of transition success, with vocational skills emerging as the strongest determinant. These findings emphasize that employability competencies, learner autonomy, strong family involvement, and structured transition programs are essential drivers of successful outcomes. Meanwhile, functional life skills, communication skills, and social skills, although important, did not significantly predict transition performance when combined with other variables. Overall, the study concludes that school-to-work transition success among LSENs requires a holistic, integrated, and collaborative approach that prioritizes vocational preparation, self-determination, family engagement, and comprehensive transition services. The results provide empirical support for the proposed framework, which may guide educators, families, schools, and policymakers in strengthening transition programs and improving employment and independent living outcomes for learners with special educational needs.

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